

# Hometown roots

## Olsen draws on a lifetime of experience, community connections as new representative

By MICHELLE KIBIGER

When Rep. Stephanie Olsen (R-Brooklyn Park) imagined how the new legislative districts would be drawn last spring, she never



Rep. Stephanie Olsen

guessed the new District 47B would so completely contain the communities she has called home during her lifetime.

But when it did, and when she realized there would be no incumbent member, she knew a

run for the House was meant to be.

"When the district was drawn, the Speaker looked at me and he said, 'It's like it was drawn for you,'" said Olsen.

The district includes all the places Olsen has called home throughout her life — her parents' home in Coon Rapids, and her current home in Brooklyn Park.

This wasn't Olsen's first run for the House — she ran for the Republican endorsement in the April 1995 special election for then-District 49B against Eldon Warkentin. She did not receive the endorsement, but her interest in the legislative process kept her active, and ultimately she came to work for the Republican caucus as an education researcher.

Olsen says the makeup of the district and consequently her ties to it made the campaign an interesting experience. She said she was able to reconnect with families she hadn't had contact with in many years, and that was a rewarding experience for her.

"Nobody was really surprised when I jumped into the race," she said. And during the campaign, she said, she and her husband, Troy, who also works for the House Republican caucus, had to find a balance between the rigors of the campaign and normal life.

As a legislator, Olsen said she hopes to bring her positive attitude and knowledge of both government in general and the education system in particular to the challenge of the looming budget deficit.

"Now is an exciting time to be elected," she

said. "We need more positive attitudes. I have a strong Christian faith and my parents always taught me that behind every challenge is a good thing in the end."

Being a teacher, Olsen said she will focus much of her attention on meeting the needs of the students, parents, and teachers of her district. She said she is interested in changing education policies, such as finding a workable solution to the state's graduation standards, which includes the Profile of Learning. But she also thinks the budget situation might create an opportunity to review education finance, as well.

---

*"The Profile of Learning isn't working for my local teachers; it's not working for kids and parents. I think we'll see resolution of that and hopefully a replacement that's acceptable to all the stakeholders."*

---

— Rep. Stephanie Olsen

"The Profile of Learning isn't working for my local teachers; it's not working for kids and parents," Olsen said. "I think we'll see resolution of that and hopefully a replacement that's acceptable to all the stakeholders."

Olsen said she will also turn her attention to the pressing needs of the north suburban communities she represents: transportation and transit options.

In addition to continued improvements in traffic flow along highways 252 and 610, Olsen said she hopes to see continued improvement to U.S. Highway 10, which runs through her district. In recent years, projects have increased the number of lanes through the growing communities of Coon Rapids, Anoka, and Andover.

With respect to transit, Olsen said she will explore expanding options for residents in the communities of the northern Twin Cities metropolitan area. In addition to the immediate needs for roads, she said busways should be examined as a flexible option for commuters. Currently, she said, residents of her district don't have as many options to get to St. Paul on the transit system without first going

through Minneapolis, which isn't convenient.

She said she's also interested in expanding suburb-to-suburb transit options in the northern metropolitan area and improving transportation options along Highway 10.

While living in Coon Rapids, Olsen traveled Highway 10 each day to attend college at St. Cloud State University. She said she hopes to bring that experience to the table when discussing transportation and transit options.

"I'm interested in the cost side of it," she said. "I'm just interested in being a part of that discussion, especially in my unique position having been on that pattern for so long."

Olsen says she's not intimidated by the budget situation, but she's ready to find a balance between cutting the budget and maintaining a level of service for constituents.

"As people voice their solutions, I want to look at those and try to bring ideas to the table myself," she said, "and solve the budget

without cutting resources — essential services, which there are. Government has a purpose."

Says family friend and Coon Rapids resident, Will Erickson, who has known Olsen and her family for many years, Olsen's energy and willingness to work hard will serve her well as a representative.

"She's a hard worker and an honest girl, and I think she'll do a great job for us," Erickson said. "In fact, I know she will."

### DISTRICT 47B

**2002 population:** 36,543

**Largest city:** Brooklyn Park

**Countries:** Hennepin, Anoka

**Location:** northern Twin Cities suburbs

**Top concern:** "I do want to see some education reform, and we may see some substantial finance reform, depending on how the budget plays out and if we can find a better way to fund our schools."

— Rep. Stephanie Olsen